



Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching

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SSLT 4 (3). 2014. 407-408

doi: 10.14746/sslit.2014.4.3.1

<http://www.sslit.amu.edu.pl>

Editorial

The title of this special issue is very deliberately wide in scope. One reason for its breadth is that the age question is somehow difficult to contain. It is very obvious to most of us these days that age is a “macrovariable” which connects to a veritable multitude of genuinely isolable and measurable factors. This is not a matter of dispute between those who favour and those who do not favour the critical/sensitive period hypothesis. The common ground between these two groups (or at least large sections of them) is that the significance of initial age of learning may be difficult to determine precisely because of the fact that it cannot be disentangled from other, interrelated, variables; that age of onset is a confounded indicator of maturation because it co-varies with a great variety of factors: social, cultural, psychological and neurological.

Another reason for the broad, inclusive approach is that I wished not to remain within the usual rhetoric of work on the age question. Of course, the matter of the critical/sensitive period often crops up, and it acts as a discrete backdrop to much of what is said. There are large tracts of discussion here, however, to which the veracity or otherwise of the critical/sensitive period hypothesis is without much relevance. The problem explored in such cases rather is simply what happens at a particular age or stage, the focus being sometimes on particular sets of circumstances. The quest in these instances is to discover what the elements may be—innate, social educational, and so on—of an explanation for the way things turn out. In a way it is perhaps regrettable that I did not find a treatment dealing with “third age” scenario; next time perhaps!

I am very happy, anyway, with the extremely diverse and interesting range of material gathered together here, and with the array of theoretically and practically important topics that are covered across the articles nestling between these covers. The warmest thanks are due to our contributors for their hard work, their wonderful insights and their excellent observance of deadlines! I trust that their endeavours will induce enlightenment in their readers but also

real enjoyment! I must also acknowledge the never-failing support and encouragement of the General Editor of *SSLLT*, Mirosław Pawlak.

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